

RMIT UNIVERSITY

NGARARA WILLIM NEWSLETTER



ISSUE 7 NOVEMBER 2020



Image credit: Justin McManus



Significant and important dates

19 Nov - International Mens Day

24-26 Nov - Careers Workshops and Industry Talks

30 Nov - End of Year Results Released!

14 December - Save the Date Deadly Alumni

17 Dec - Graduation

25 Dec - 1 Jan - RMIT Shut Down

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Womin Djeka!

Welcome to the 7th edition

Womin Djeka! Its *Buath Gurru*, grass flowering season. The weather is warming, and the rains are still around. It's a lovely time for all Victorians to be moving out of isolation and restrictions. We hope that you have all had the opportunity to catch up with your mob. For those of you waiting on the borders to re-open to catch up with family, hang in there!

Ngarara Willim celebrated NAIDOC week by joining online activities starting with the Victorian NAIDOC Awards evening. We heard from past NAIDOC award recipients and were proud to see our very own Lewis Brown talking about his experience being Mr NAIDOC in 2012. As a team we watched the Flag Raising and the NAIDOC March. We want to congratulate the Victorian NAIDOC Committee and all involved.

The Ngarara team took some time to reflect on the National NAIDOC theme of 'Always Was, Always Will Be' and the local Victorian NAIDOC theme of 'Protect Country'. Our discussion led by the recent destruction of the 46,000-year-old Juukan Gorge on Puutu Kuntj Kurrama and Pinikura country and the ongoing struggle on Djap Wurrung country to protect sites of significance.

The Ngarara team have been busy as usual with the delivery of the annual Deadly STEM Experience.

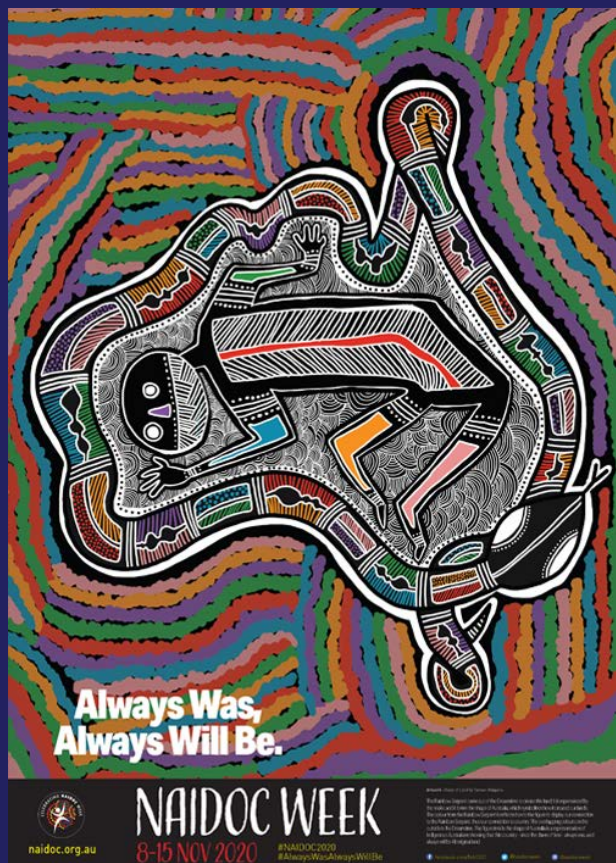
The event engaged secondary students in STEM and cultural activities online. We look forward to the program continuing in 2021.

This edition features two of our deadly students, Ti'a Pynor Greedy and Clint Hansen. We also hear from one of our Deadly Alumni, Robbie Stephen-Dettman, who shares his journey through RMIT and beyond as a mature aged student.

We would like to let our graduates know that we will hold an online Ngarara Willim Deadly Alumni and Graduation event on the evening of Monday 14 December. We also hope to see our Deadly Alumni join us on the night. You will be notified about this event via email and canvas in the coming weeks. We hope that you and your family can join us to celebrate your achievements and successes. This will kick off your celebrations to the RMIT Graduation Virtual event that will be held on Thursday 17 December. Please keep a look out for the registration information in your student email.

We would like to congratulate all of our Year 12s who have had a challenging year. We wish you all the best with exams and final assessments. Good Luck you mob!

With Christmas fast approaching, we hope that you are able help support our Aboriginal Young people in out of home care over the upcoming holidays by providing financial donations to the VACCA Christmas appeal. We encourage you all to dig deep!



Shop Vic NAIDOC 2020

vicnaidoc.com.au/shop



CARING FOR COUNTRY

Voices from the frontline

On Monday our biggest nightmare became a cold hard reality. The sounds of chainsaws, excessive police force, the crying of children. We felt defeated as an element of our culturally significant landscape was torn away, taken, gone forever. We are the last generation to ever be in the powerful presence of our directions tree on Djab Wurrung country.

Sissy Eileen Austin
The Guardian; Oct 27th 2020

I am heartbroken, I am absolutely devastated, and I can feel the pain of my ancestors. I am so disappointed that a government who promised a treaty with my people has undermined us and done something as malicious and calculated as this to our community. It's very difficult to presume anything other than this strategy being well thought out and opportunistic.

Lidia Thorpe
The Age; Oct 28th 2020

Our bodies are at one with the country, we can feel the chains of the chainsaw grinding through our souls, our spirits. The sounds of those chainsaws will haunt us forever and be added to the already existing intergenerational trauma shadowing our people. There are no words to describe the emptiness we as Djab Wurrung are feeling right now.

Sissy Eileen Austin
The Guardian; Oct 27th 2020

“ There is this
indescribable feeling
that comes with
attempting to seek
justice and empathy
from the very same
system that was built
to destroy. Destroy it
did, and destroying
it continues to do ”

Sissy Eileen Austin

The Guardian; Oct 27th 2020

ALWAYS WAS ALWAYS WILL BE

A reflection on the 2020 NAIDOC theme

This year's NAIDOC theme speaks both to the past and to the future. 'Always was' acknowledges the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's 60,000+ year relationship with country. 'Always will be' is a strong statement and reminder that despite settler colonialism we do and we will continue our relationship to country.

Recent events including the destruction of the 46,000 year old Juukan Gorge on Puutu Kunti Kurrama and Pinikura country and the ongoing struggle on Djap Wurrung country to protect sites of significance led to a conversation within the Ngarara Willim Centre team that we would like to share.

Firstly, we need think it is important to remember what our relationship to country means. Country has intrinsic value that is not dependent upon human perceptions of value, utility or worth.

The loss of the beautiful 350+ year old yellow box tree that was felled in a moment and shoved in the back of truck with so little respect is a tragedy irrespective of any issues of cultural heritage or value ascribed or contested by humans.

A conversation has been triggered by the destruction of the directions tree on Djap Wurrung country about cultural heritage which is tied to human perceptions of what is valuable or not. The conversation has centred in part around the issue of evidence of pre-colonial human manipulation of the tree.

This triggered a conversation in the Ngarara team which centred on how the way that these conversations impact upon the ability for Aboriginal people in contemporary contexts to declare our own sites of significance and to define our own sacred places in our here and now.

On the RMIT campus we have sites of significance to us as Aboriginal people. Ngarara Willim is our place of gathering, of storytelling and a place of support for our community. Ngarara Place is a place of gathering and is a symbol of our culture and presence and a place where our contemporary identities and the older knowledge of our hosts the Woi Wurrung and Boon Wurrung peoples mix. Wurrunggi Biik stands tall on Bowen St as a marker of our presence, our strength and our cultures. We have a possum skin cloak made by the hands of our staff and students that will one day be 500 years old if we remember to protect country. We have each other, we have our shared struggles and our collective experiences that have created other places of significance in the urban landscape.

When we reflect on the places of 'traditional' significance we are reminded of what 'always was' means. When we reflect on what 'always will be' means there is an assertion of our continued living relationship to country which requires the emergence of new sacred and significant places that emerge and will emerge through our continued connection to country.



Image credit: Djab Wurrung Embassy



Image credit: Djab Wurrung Embassy

VACCA Christmas

RMIT University, through the Ngarara Willim Centre have decided to register to support VACCA Christmas Appeal to raise money for a cause that is close to our heart. Please support our efforts by making a secure online donation and by posting a message of support. VACCA supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who are in foster care, kinship and residential care and vulnerable families in our community.

Funds raised will help support VACCA's ongoing efforts to support families during the festive season. Your donation will make sure a child receives a gift this Christmas. Thank you!

Any Amount Can Help!

A tax deductible receipt will automatically provided.

Donate now via this link: bit.ly/2JSSgR7



Help raise funds for
Aboriginal children in
care this Christmas



**Donate now to give
a special gift for an
Aboriginal child in care.**

Applications

It is not too late to apply for a program at RMIT. If you're interested in studying, please get in contact with me to find out more about your options. We have programs for those wanting to study in Vocational, Higher, and Postgraduate Education. There are pathway options available across a wide range of subject areas. I can also help you with advice about accessing programs, applying for scholarships, and finding student accommodation.

Cathy Doe: cathy.doe@rmit.edu.au, 9925 8807

Congratulations year 12 students

Good luck and congratulations to all year 12 students who are finishing up their exams this month. This is a culmination of many years of hard work, the end of one chapter in your life, and the beginning of a new one. We hope you can take a well-earned break to celebrate, re-energise and reflect on your achievements.



Student Spotlight

Ti'a Pynor Greedy

Name: Ti'a

Mob: Wiradjuri, Papua New Guinean

Course: Bachelor Criminal Justice

Tell us about yourself (Your background/your journey)?

Growing up, I was lucky enough to be raised on country, I also embraced both my Indigenous heritage and my Papua New Guinea heritage.

I knew that growing up being a blackfulla would intersect with many aspects of adulthood as my life unfolds. I used this to my advantage to pursue tertiary education to work with mob after my studies.

What/who inspired you to study at RMIT?

My mum inspired me to pursue tertiary education, as I am the first in my family to go to university, so my mum supports me on this. It was the Ngarara Willim's outreach efforts that helped me decide to go to RMIT. It was the reassurance and guidance provided by Ngarara Willim to help get me to university and made me feel like I have a place in tertiary education.

What was it like transitioning to university?

The transition was smooth but also bittersweet. I still felt very young and I had to move to a big city that's 3 and a half hours from home. This also forced me to mature up and be independent and it was a good opportunity to grow into adulthood.

During the transition, I felt embraced and supported by the Ngarara Willim Centre. And it was through the centre that I've been able to make strong connections in Melbourne.

What do you enjoy most about engaging with Ngarara Willim?

I enjoy engaging with the Ngarara Willim Centre because it allows me to build and create connections with other mob. I also love the sense of "home" that's provided to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students through the facilities and services provided.

What does "Ngarara Willim" (Gathering Place) mean to you?

To me it means a safe meet place for mob to come together to meet, yarn, work and build meaningful relationships with one another.



Tell us about relocating for study (If interstate/ from regional)

Relocating was difficult for me to move away for the first time by myself and live off country, there was an adjustment period of roughly 9 months where I had to find my feet. It was with Ngarara Willim's support, facilities and experiences that helped make me feel at home and that I had a sense of belonging.

What's your proudest moment/achievements since studying at RMIT?

When I first got a "High Distinction" mark was a proud moment for me, throughout high school I didn't receive high marks like that. For me it was validating to receive this high mark as it helped me realise that I have what it takes to study and pursue higher education.

I also undertook an indigenous study exchange program where I studied in British Columbia, Canada for 6 months. The exchange took me out of my comfort zone and allowed me to grow mentally and spiritually. The program really helped me find validation from within and not externally!

What would be your message to community members thinking of studying at university?

Yes! I strongly suggest to study at university, it allows for amazing opportunities and to meet people and have amazing experiences. There's a lot of support for indigenous support, especially at RMIT.

I strongly suggest RMIT as Ngarara Willim is such an amazing support and there are safe places all over our campuses for mob to grow!

Student Experience: Clint Hansen

Can you tell us a little about yourself who your mob is and where you from and what you study?

Hi, my name is Clint Hansen I am an Iman man from central Queensland born and raised on Darumbal country in Rockhampton where many of my family still live. Previously, I left school at 15 to pursue and complete a trade as a fitter and turner and have since moved to study an advanced diploma in Mechanical Engineering and then a Sustainable Systems Engineering honours undergraduate degree at RMIT.

Can you give us a quick summary of your capstone project and the issue that it is addressing?

The project attempts to provide safe, clean drinking water for the remote community of Mulga Queen the traditional country of the Ngaanyatjarra, Pintupi and Pitjantjatjara peoples, who's current supply exceeds both the Australian Drinking Water Guidelines and the World Health Organisation guideline's for nitrate concentration.

Strong evidence suggests ingestion of nitrate is

What is a problem you did not expect to come up during the project?

To state the obvious, COVID-19 really did affect the project in a huge way. The original intentions heading into this project were to build a clean drinking water filtration system in a shipping container that had been designed by our Industry partners Optimus Group. This System was too clean 1000ltr's of ground water a day utilising three separate technologies, reverse osmosis (RO), ion-exchange (IX) and solar distillation (SD), whilst a UV unit will disinfect the water. Unfortunately, we were unable to gain access to onsite laboratories to build the system and test synthetic water samples to proof the system.

However, the project team and I took on this challenge and I felt like it was a better outcome as it meant we and the broader stakeholder group were forced to look at the project from a deeper perspective. This meant rather than a simple plug and play system dropped off to the community to 'fix' the problem it involved further intentional relationship building and learnings.



linked to the blue baby syndrome in infants and Renal diseases such as chronic kidney disease amongst adults. Based on an in-depth analysis of all aspects of the problem and consultation with stakeholders, the group has provided an all-inclusive, community driven and appropriate technology-based solution to the problem. This was done through covering topics of:

- Appropriate technology and capacity building amongst community
- Systems of policy governing water supply and the delivery of services for remote communities
- Inclusion of cultural perspectives, respectful engagement, and effective means of communicating complex scientific and health concepts

What is a path of research or practice that you enjoyed learning/doing?

I really enjoyed learning more about policy and governance and what that means for our mob and their rights to a fairer involvement in decision making for their own Drinking water supply. Through the research I conducted early on looking into an Ombudsman report on the Remote Area Essential Services Program I had found that the commonwealth had defunded the program and handed it over to the State government of Western Australia. This meant that the government tried closing many communities down which sparked the protests in the same year to keep them open. Sometimes when I see wrongful treatment of our communities I have been in shock, wondering why these injustices continue to occur. So, for me it meant



getting to the actual root cause of why the drinking water supply was not being maintained appropriately by the service providers.

How did you feel completing your capstone?

I feel like it has taken me the last 2 weeks since completion to fully reflect on the project after navigating the academic space of research. I feel joy, for the many late nights and early mornings are now much less often. I also feel very determined to pursue further education to help impact real meaningful change in our many communities including community back home. Yiman/Iman Country back home ways is often impacted by natural gas extraction from huge oil companies.

Throughout my five years of study, I had many up's and down's as we all do trying to navigate unfamiliar spaces and places. However, it was about 2 years after completing my vocational education course and 6 months into my mechanical engineering undergrad in the same field that I really did lose interest in what I was studying. I picked up a program guide during midyear break at Ngarara Willim and found out that there was a Sustainable Systems Engineering degree. I read through the course breakdown and thought, "Gee this looks half decent".

That day I had made up my mind fully after not long coming back from where I grew up to attend a community meeting for my mob where we had a Shell representative tell us all that 400 new gas wells were going to be built within the next year on Yiman/Iman country. Myself, family and many elders felt powerless to these words and filled with outrage, upon returning down this way I thought nope I need a change I am not doing enough, and this isn't enough. My intentions are to now through the privilege of completing my honours degree to be more equipped and aware then I once was to have these types of big companies listen to what I have to say rather than just push us aside. For a western education is all they seem to respect.

In retrospect, is there anything you would approach differently?

This project builds off the [Western Desert Kidney Health Project](#) by Dr Christine Jeffries-Stokes where chronic kidney disease and blue baby syndrome has been linked to the high level of Nitrate and uranium in the drinking water of many communities in the Goldfields region. In retrospect I would have liked to get in contact via phone with this Dr earlier in the project timeline. I also think it would have been beneficial for myself to reach out directly to the community earlier in the project who were engaging with University Queensland and my supervisor Matthew Currell at RMIT.

Any final thoughts?

Thanks to those that have helped me over my 5 years of my journey down hear in Melbourne along with my supervisor Matthew, Crystal for the many proof readings, Paul, Dakota, Cyan for listening to all my ramblings, and my teammates Angus and Andrei.

The friends I have made and the Ngarara Willim community that has welcomed me to continue to connect and thrive which continues to be there for me and always will be. Also, to my mother who has raised myself and 4 siblings on her own and through her many stern words, sacrifices and lessons I have become the person I am today. Love you mum xoxo.

Stay deadly you mob, to those navigating academic spaces, your work is inspiring, and I am excited for where the journey takes us.

Check out the presentation here:
flipgrid.com/d86be2a7

Check out the Academic Poster here:
bit.ly/3pBZw4g

Deadly STEM Experience

The Ngarara Willim Centre and the School of Science hosted the Deadly STEM Experience for around 80 Indigenous high school students from schools across Victoria and Australia. The program actively engaged students in a mix of culture and STEM themed sessions and workshops along with both current and former Indigenous students from RMIT.

Workshops ran online from 26 October to 10 November and included the following:

Workshop 1 Deadly Day of Python

Students checked out what Computer Science is all about in our Python Game Jam workshop! Participants learnt the basics of Python through developing a game, and learned how to use a developer environment and understand how Computer Science translates into the real world.

Facilitated by RMIT students, Zach Wingrave and Sarah Longhurst, participants were able to code their very own Space Invaders arcade game!

Workshop 2 Radio Rescue

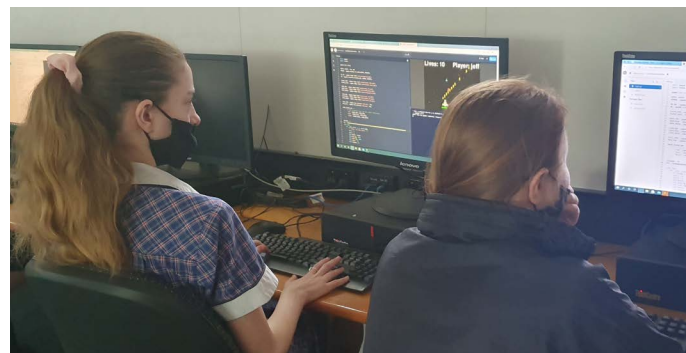
Students participated in an online first person STEM game called Labster and were given the following narrative for a problem based learning project.

The scenario was that the students' radio transmitter had broken down and they needed to repair it in order to contact their fellow colleagues in Antarctica. To do this they learned how resistors work, how resistance is modified by different parameters, and how the radio transmitter is wired.

Workshop 3 Cause of Contamination

Also on Labster, participants was given the following narrative to learn about good vs bad bacteria!

In the Bacterial Isolation simulation, they investigated the cause of a contamination by poultry meat with a dangerous bacteria strain that is resistant to common antibiotics. After taking samples from the chicken farm, the students worked in the virtual laboratory to isolate



The kids got a lot out of the experience. I look forward to growing this partnership and working together again in the near future

Elijah Makoni
Bundoora Secondary College

single colonies of the deadly bacteria. To do this, they learned how to work under sterile conditions, and to practice and perfect your plate streaking.

Tertiary Student Experiences

The Deadly STEM Experience hosted 2 different Q&A events hosted via Microsoft Teams Live.

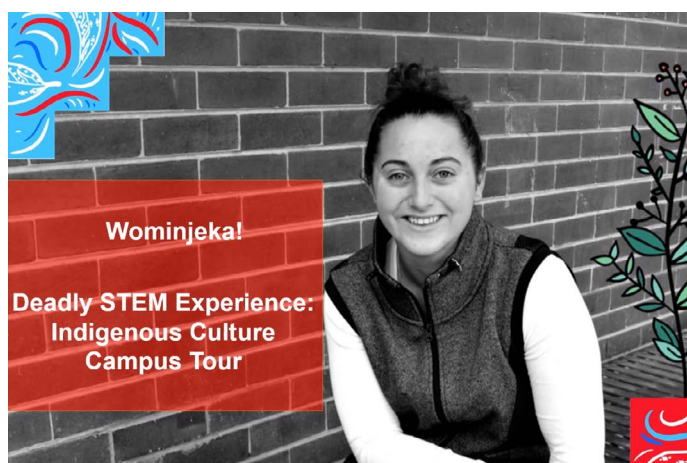
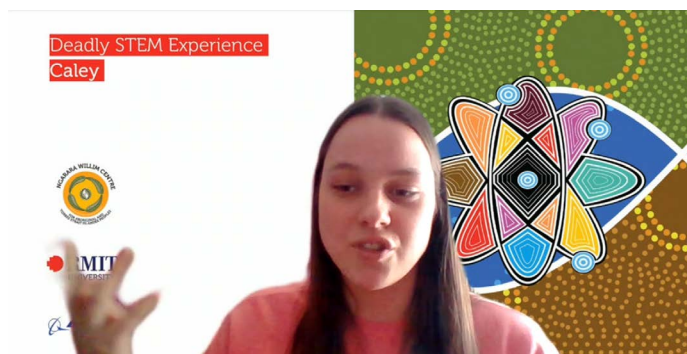
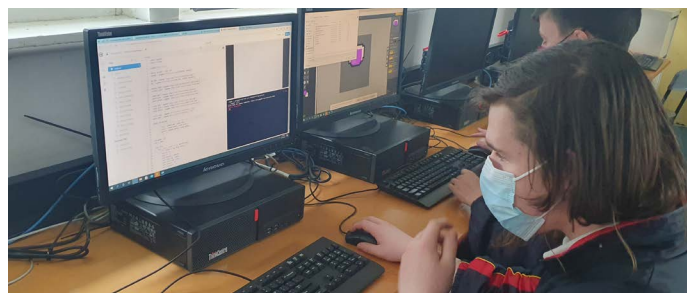
The first event featured Ngarara Willim students and mentors, Lou Bloomer, Phillip Morris, Caley Manzie and Eloise Moya. Panelists shared their authentic experiences as RMIT students and gave the audience a realistic sense of what university studies entail.

Another Q&A was hosted which featured STEM student Clint Hansen and STEM Alumni Candice Bowditch. Participants heard about Clint and Candice's study journeys, achievements and future aspirations in the STEM space!

Participants also heard from the RMIT Student Recruitment team, where they were informed about the exciting programs at RMIT.

Virtual RMIT Cultural Tour

Proud Wiradjuri woman, April Goldring, virtually hosted an event, immersing participants in First Nations Culture, sharing knowledge and the hidden history of Naarm through the Virtual Indigenous Culture Campus Tour crafted at RMIT University!



I think the program worked really well in giving some insight to our students of where studying STEM could take them, and opening their eyes to possible pathways in this direction.

Maria Gasbarro
Reservoir High School

The Ngarara Willim Centre would like to give special thanks to the following people from the RMIT community for their collaborative efforts and contribution to the program and to supporting the future of our young people:

- Dr. William Sullivan (Organiser & Facilitator)
- Jade Khoo (Organiser)
- Zach Wingrave (Organiser & Deadly Python Facilitator)
- Sarah Longhurst (Deadly Python Facilitator)
- Saumaya Fernando (Labster Facilitator)
- Tarika Singh (Student Recruitment Presenter)
- Michael Palermo (Student Recruitment Presenter)
- April Goldring (Cultural Tour Facilitator)
- Thomas Lieu (Cultural Tour Support)
- Lucy Piggin (Cultural Tour Support)
- Lou Bloomer (Student Mentor)
- Eloise Moya (Student Mentor)
- Trinity Peachey (Student Mentor)
- Caley Manzie (Student Mentor)
- Phillip Morris (Student Mentor)

Deadly Alumni: Robbie

Stephen-Dettmann



Tell us about your RMIT experience.

My experience at RMIT was fantastic. I had come out of a very dangerous domestic violence relationship and overcome a substance abuse issue in my life. I didn't quite know what to do with myself so through talking with my mental health counsellor decided I would undertake some study to find out why certain things had happened to me.

What did you study?

In my first year I studied the Cert IV in Alcohol and Other Drugs as a means to finding out what had caused me to have a substance use problem. I loved the course so much that I went on the next year to study the Diploma in Alcohol and Other Drugs. I was so lucky to have the most awesome lecturer and as a result was really fortunate to be awarded the William Cooper Prize for commitment to community and study.

How did your course influence your career?

WOW what a question, this study influenced my career so much that I then went on to study my TAE 40116 + LLN so that I could become a teacher myself and give back to those that had given me so much and to the future youth of our community.

What was your biggest takeaway from studying at RMIT?

My biggest take away from studying at RMIT was that no matter how old you are, what adversity you have faced and how alone you might feel there is a family that will envelope you with empathy and kindness that you can go on to achieve anything that you want.

How are you still connected to RMIT and the Ngarara Willim community?

I have gone on to be a Sessional Teacher at RMIT which I love and I have stayed connected to Ngarara Willim by being a volunteer practitioner in the AoD sector at Galiamble Aboriginal Mens Rehabilitation Service that services other men from the Woi Wurrung and Boon Wurrung language groups of the East Kulin Nation - which I love, too deadly.



Robbie Stephen-Dettmann Deadly Alumni

No matter how old you are, what adversity you have faced and how alone you might feel there is a family that will envelope you with empathy and kindness that you can go on to achieve anything that you want.

Have you maintained any mentors from your time here?

Yes, my main mentor has become a life long friend whom I see every week and have forged an awesome relationship with.

Do you mentor/guest lecture/etc?

Yes I mentor, guest speak and lecture all the time for many different organisations.

What are the top three things you've learned in your career?

In my second life career I have learned the following top 4 things:

- How to chill out and relax
- Nothing is the end of the world
- Trust in myself because others trust in me
- Palawa men are welcomed and accepted by Woi Wurrung and Boon Wurrung as their own.

What are your plans for 2021 and beyond?

I've commenced studying my Masters in Youth Mental Health, I am also doing another Cert IV and Diploma in WHS and I want to continue giving back to my community and the larger community.



Meet our Staff



Nicole

Arabana
Manager
Indigenous Student Education



Jason

Tharawal
Senior Manager
Indigenous Education



Cathy D.

Irukandji
Senior Advisor
Indigenous Access and
Engagement



Lewis

**Gunditjmara, Yorta Yorta,
Dja Dja Wurrung**
Coordinator
Indigenous Outreach



Carlie

Coordinator
Indigenous Student Education



Cathy L.

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ngarara.willim@rmit.edu.au

Our Artists

Trees — Louisa Bloomer
Leaves (watermark) — Alanna Sandy
Ngarara Willim logo — Mandy Nicholson

This newsletter is a collective effort that is written and created by the Ngarara Willim Centre team (see previous page)